



OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR GENERAL

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20220

November 13, 2006

The Honorable John P. Higgins, Jr.
Chairman, PCIE Audit Committee
Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Chairman Higgins:

I am pleased to inform the PCIE Audit Committee that the IGATI Curriculum Review Board (ICRB) has completed a review of the IGATI course titled *Writing to the Point*. While there were a few positive aspects to the course, a number of factors that led us to recommend that the course be dropped from the IGATI curriculum. That being said, we also recommend that some of the concepts covered in the course be combined with the IGATI course titled *Essentials of Report Writing*. The IGATI Director agreed with our recommendations.

Enclosed is a copy of our final report prepared by the Acting Assistant Auditor General, Plans, Policy and Resources, Naval Audit Service.

If you have any questions, please call me on (202) 927-6516.

Sincerely,

/s/

Marla A. Freedman
Chair, ICRB

Enclosure

cc: Helen Lew, Chair
Federal Audit Executive Committee

Danny L. Athanasaw, Director
Inspector General Auditor Training Institute



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
NAVAL AUDIT SERVICE
1006 BEATTY PLACE SE
WASHINGTON NAVY YARD, DC 20374-5005

November 8, 2006

Ms. Marla A. Freedman
Assistant Inspector General for Audit
Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Ms. Freedman:

Subject: REPORT ON INSPECTOR GENERAL AUDITORS TRAINING INSTITUTE
(IGATI) REVIEW OF COURSE: WRITING TO THE POINT

This letter transmits the Communication Audit Group of the IGATI Curriculum Review Board's final report on this subject.

The report contains four recommendations. IGATI agrees with all four recommendations. We have included IGATI's response in the report.

We appreciate the courtesies extended to our staff. If there are any questions, please contact Mr. Dave Evans at (202) 433-5116 or me at (202) 433-5706.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Samuel E. Chason", is positioned above the printed name.

SAMUEL E. CHASON
Acting Assistant Auditor General
Plans, Policy and Resources

Report of IGATI Curriculum Review Board
Review of IGATI Course:
Writing to the Point
June 28-29, 2006

Course Title:

Writing to the Point

ICRB Review Completed:

July 20, 2006, by the Naval Audit Service and the Office of Inspector General at the Department of Housing and Development

Background:

The Performance Audit Group of the IGATI Curriculum Review Board (ICRB) was tasked to perform an assessment of IGATI Communication courses. The Naval Audit Service assigned a staff member to review and assess the IGATI Communication course titled Writing to the Point. Naval Audit Service and the Office of Inspector General at the Department of Housing and Development each sent a staff member to observe, review and assess the course.

IGATI is now known as the Inspector General (IG) Institute School of Audit and Inspections (SAI) and will formally consolidate in Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 with the Criminal Investigative Academy and the Management Institute. Under this new structure, a new Board of Governors will provide policy direction to the new consolidated IG Institute. The Board of Governors will have final approval on the FY 2007 course offerings. Additionally, it is anticipated that all courses starting in FY 2007 will be contracted out.

Course Objective

The 2-day course is for auditors, evaluators, and inspectors from throughout the Federal Office of Inspector General (OIG). According to the FY 2006 course catalog, the goals of the course are to prepare the student upon completion to be able to:

- Identify their writing habits
- Identify their audiences,
- Write in concise sentences,
- Use deductive structure in writing paragraphs, and
- Review a document quickly.

Since March 2005, a total of 38 students attended four separate classes. The same instructor taught two of the four classes held in March and July 2005. Two other different instructors taught the classes held in May 2005 and June 2006. Except for the field of study in accounting and auditing, there is no prerequisite for this course.

Each participant earned 16 CPE credits by attending the 2 days of classroom training and the tuition was \$510.

ICRB Assessment:

Objective and Methodology of ICRB Review

The review objective was to determine whether the SAI course titled Writing to the Point provides training that is useful to Federal auditors. Specifically, the course material for students and the instructor were reviewed together with class observations of the recent June 28-29, 2006 course to determine whether the course was:

- Current
- Relevant to the course objectives
- Substantive
- Complete to address the course objectives
- Useful as a reference resource.

Also, student evaluations for courses held in March, May, and July 2005 and the recent June 28-29 2006 course were reviewed, and six former students from Offices of Inspectors General at the U.S. Agency for International Development, Veterans Administration, Department of Defense, Department of Labor, and Department of Justice and two supervisors of former students from the Offices of Inspectors General at the U.S. Agency for International Development and Department of Justice were interviewed to determine any significant trends. Highlights and significant comments resulting from this review follow.

Course Content and Material

We generally found the course content and material to be generic writing. The exercises in the first three chapters of the course workbook were not very meaningful and didn't involve much writing. The inductive/deductive exercise on Page 3.3 was misleading to half the class because it misspelled the term miner as minor. The exercise on using advance organizers on Pages 3.5 through 3.9 wasn't useful for this class since most students did not have a voice in how their respective organizations format audit/inspection reports. The exercises in Chapters 4 and 5 were useful to auditors and evaluators but the course should include more individual writing exercises. The instructor skipped the *Linking ideas with repetition* exercise on Page 4.6 and the topic area *RELATE SENTENCES WITH PARALLELISM* on Page 4.7 of the course workbook though both involve concepts useful to evaluative writing. The exercise in Chapter 6 seems more appropriate for an editing course. Chapter 7 is an excellent writing exercise. However, the students should do more than one exercise. Further, SAI should have the material already on the computers so the students don't spend time retyping it. The last exercise in the course concerned with looking for the elements of a finding in recent newspaper articles is excellent training for evaluative writing.

The instructor handed out a Power Point presentation at the beginning of the course to make the course material clearer. The presentation slides highlighted the main concepts and principles in the course workbook. The preposition slides were good exercises. However, the slides did contain some errors. For example, the slides titled *Count the prepositions* and *A possible rewrite* did not show the correct count of prepositions. Further, the slide titled *State message in a few sentences* had the bullet: *Write each heading, finding, and recommendation in one sentence*. The class noted that the sentence was poorly written and the instructor agreed with the class.

We did note some typos in the course workbook. For example, RECOMMENDATIO for Page 26 on Page 3.7 of the workbook should read “RECOMMENDATIONS”. Further, the use of the term “or” in the first sentence of the first paragraph on Page 5.9 should read “of”. This is important since the exercise does involve the counting of prepositions. Similarly, the use of the term “or” in the third line of the sentence in the slide titled *Limit prepositions* should read “of”.

Class Observations

The course instructor was knowledgeable of the subject and skilled in keeping students interested and listening. The instructor had a sense of humor, made the students laugh, and had a good rapport with them.

We found that the students were provided too little time to do individual writing exercises but more than sufficient time to discuss common writing problems and engage in collaborative or team-based activity. Learning how to write and writing are not team efforts. As a result, the students did not receive much time to actually practice individual writing skills. This is supported by student feedback that indicated additional writing exercises would improve the course. Further, the instructor did not provide the students with any personal evaluation of their individual writing skills. There should be adequate time in the course to do more writing exercises and provide feedback to each individual. Most students completed the team-based activities quickly and started passing the time chatting while waiting for the class to proceed. If the students did the Chapter 7 exercise at the end of the first day then the instructor could review and give personal feedback the next day. Also, it would be beneficial to the students when they return to their workplace if at the beginning of the course each student provided a sample or two of their writing to the instructor for review and feedback.

During the morning of the first day of class the instructor had difficulty with the Power Point slides. The instructor’s remote keyboard was not functioning. Fortunately, the students had hardcopies of the slides and were able to follow lesson topics, the instructor eventually dispensed with using the slide projector for the remainder of the course. In discussion with SAI we were advised that this was an anomaly. However, SAI was in the process of identifying the cause.

Student Instructor Feedback

To measure student feedback about courses and instructors, SAI has students complete evaluation forms at the end of each course. The following table presents our analyses of student evaluations for the 4 courses held during the year 2005 and 2006. The key questions of the evaluations are based on a scale from 1-5 where 5 = Strongly Agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neutral; 2 = Disagree; and 1 = Strongly Disagree.

SAI Survey Questions	Composite Scores for Current and Past Classes			
Class Date	June 28-29, 2006	July 07-08, 2005	May 27-28, 2005	March 03-04, 2005
No. of Evaluations	8	11	9	10
Key Questions				
Instructor				
Organized and prepared	4.50	3.82	5.00	4.40
Knowledge of subject matter	4.50	3.82	4.89	4.40
Communicated effectively	4.63	3.55	4.89	4.10
Displayed enthusiasm and interest	4.75	3.18	4.67	4.30
Encourages class participation	4.88	4.00	4.78	4.60
Responsive to students needs	4.88	4.09	4.67	4.50
Class time effectively used	4.75	3.64	4.78	4.10
Instructor Average	4.70	3.73	4.81	4.34
Course/Module				
Achieved objectives	4.25	3.45	4.67	4.10
Subject content organized	4.25	3.64	4.67	4.10
Course Materials were relevant/useful	4.13	3.64	4.44	4.20
Course will help job performance	4.13	3.36	4.56	4.20
Overall, course was valuable learning experience	4.25	3.18	4.44	4.30
Course/Module Average	4.20	3.45	4.56	4.18
Overall Average	4.49	3.61	4.70	4.28

The majority of students stated the instructor was prepared, organized, and knowledgeable of the subject, communicated effectively, encouraged class participation,

responded to student needs and used class time in an effective manner. Strong and weak points on the SAI instructors follow.

- For the March 2005 course, the instructor's overall average score for the course/module was 4.34 ranging from 4.1 to 4.6.
- For the May 2005 course, the instructor's overall average score for the course/module was 4.81 ranging from 4.7 to 5.
- For the July 2005 course, the instructor's overall average score for the course/module was 3.73 ranging from 3.2 to 4.1.
- For the recent June 2006 course, the instructor's overall average score for the course/module was 4.70 ranging from 4.5 to 4.9.

Recurring narrative comments on the evaluations regarding the SAI instructors were positive comments on how the instructors' past experience, discussions, and class exercises enhanced the usefulness and relevancy of course topics. Some students stated that the instructors were sensitive to student needs, enthusiastic, organized, and provided effective instruction.

Student comments: June 2006 Course. "SAI Instructor's good sense of humor and enthusiasm enhanced the learning experience."

Student comments: July 2005 Course. "The SAI instructor had a wide and deep knowledge of subject. Writing exercises were very helpful."

Student comments: May 2005 Course. "The SAI instructor presented the material in an effective and organized manner. Good exercises and practice in writing concise sentences."

Student comments: March 2005 Course. "The SAI instructor's past experience, discussions, and class exercises put class topics in perspective. The presentation of slides was excellent."

A review of the evaluation forms disclosed strong and weak points on the course/module.

- March 2005: average course/module score was 4.18 ranging from 4.1 to 4.3.
- May 2005: average course/module score was 4.56 ranging from 4.4 to 4.7.
- July 2005: average course/module score was 3.45 ranging from 3.2 to 3.6.
- June 2006: average course/module score was 4.20 ranging from 4.1 to 4.3.

Recurring narrative comments on the course/module were positive comments on the effectiveness of the class exercises and the overall usefulness and relevancy of the

writing course. Comments to improve the classes included more time devoted to the presentation of class slides, writing exercises, and evaluating individual exercises.

As noted in the four evaluation comparisons, the overall score for the recent June 2006 course improved more than three-quarters of a point compared to the previous July 2005 course, though the overall score of the latter course was significantly lower than the overall scores of the two previous May and March 2005 courses. We did note a decline in the recent June 2006 and July 2005 courses compared to the previous two May and March 2005 courses as concerns overall scores for the course being a valuable learning experience, helpful to job performance, and providing useful and relevant materials. Specifically, 7 of 19 (37 percent) of the students did not view the recent two courses to be an overall valuable learning experience and 5 of these 7 students did not view the course material as useful and relevant.

Post Course Response from Supervisors and Students

As part of the course review, we sent follow-up surveys to six former students who took the course in the last 12 months in an effort to obtain post course thoughts and contacted their supervisors for information. We selected the former students from the July 2005 course roster provided by SAI. Three solicitation attempts were made and all 6 student responses and 2 supervisor responses were received. The survey questions were based on Appendices B and C of the ICRB Course Content Review Methodology.

Of the 6 former students interviewed, 3 stated that the course improved their ability to effectively communicate in a clearer and concise manner and for this reason they liked the course. The other three students stated that they were not pleased with the course because it was too basic. The students cited the exercises for writing concise sentences and group interaction as the strong points of the course. The latter three students expected more writing exercises than were provided in the course. One former student expected more guidance on how to format and structure Office of Inspector General (OIG) reports. However, the course's catalog description and objectives and the Purpose section of the course's workbook focus on improving the students' skills at writing evaluation and inspection products and not necessarily on writing OIG reports. The weak points of the course varied from the course having too few writing exercises to the instructor providing too little discussion and practical examples to supplement the writing exercises. Also, one former student stated that students would benefit from the course having more individual writing exercises and less team-based exercises given that the course is for only two days. Of the 6 former students, 5 stated that the writing exercises were helpful in improving their skills and knowledge on how to write direct and succinct sentences in the workplace.

Neither of the two supervisors felt the course overall was a benefit to the staff members' professional development and the needs of the agency. One supervisor stated that she has not observed any significant improvement in the staff member's writing skills. The other supervisor of two former students stated that her staff members did not acquire the skills and knowledge on how to write OIG reports that were expected from the training. Again,

the course's catalog description and objectives focus on writing evaluation and inspection products and not necessarily writing OIG reports. The latter is more the focus of the 3-day SAI course titled Essentials of Report Writing.

Conclusion

Based on our review of the course material, observations of the classes, and responses from attendees, we believe that the SAI course titled Writing to the Point is a generic writing course. Since Federal auditors and evaluators can get such courses from a multitude of other sources we recommend that SAI should drop the course from its curriculum and combine the concepts presented in Chapters 4 and 5 of the course workbook with the SAI course titled Essentials of Reporting Writing. This approach would require additional analysis of the practicality and feasibility of combining the two writing courses. Recommendations 2 through 7 listed below, cover some areas that can benefit the course.

ICRB Recommendations

We recommend that SAI:

1. Drop the course titled Writing to the Point from its curriculum and combine the concepts and principles presented in the course with the SAI course titled Essentials of Report Writing.
2. If course is maintained, revise the course to include more individual writing exercises with the focus on the concepts taught in Chapters 4 and 5 of the course workbook.
3. If course is maintained:
 - Provide the students with a personal evaluation of their individual writing skills;
 - Input Chapter 7 exercise material into computers so students don't spend time retyping material.
4. Ensure the Power Point presentation slides regarding the overuse of prepositions show the correct count of prepositions and the bullet sentences in the slide titled *State message in a few sentences* are not poorly written.

SAI Director Comments and Planning Actions:

SAI Director provided the following memorandum in response to our report. SAI generally agreed with our recommendations. SAI will use this report to make a final decision on whether or not to continue this course in FY 2007.



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Phone (703) 248-4592 • Fax (703) 248-4587

MEMORANDUM FOR: Joan T. Hughes
Assistant Auditor General
Installation and Environment Audits
Naval Audit Service

FROM: Danny L. Athanasaw
Director,
School of Audit and Inspections (SAI)

SUBJECT: SAI Response to Draft Report of ICRB Review of Course:
Writing to the Point

Thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to the draft report of SAI's Course: **Writing to the Point**.

SAI is presently in a transition year and will formally consolidate in Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 with the Criminal Investigative Academy and the Management Institute. Additionally, there is a new Board of Governors that will provide policy direction to the new consolidated Inspector General Institute. The Board of Governors will have final approval on the FY 2007 course offerings. It is also anticipated that all courses starting in FY 2007 will be contracted out. As a result, there is an opportunity to re-evaluate all course materials and make any necessary changes for this course. The SAI will use this report to make a final decision on whether or not to continue this course in FY 2007.

SAI's response to each recommendation follows:

Recommendation 1: Agree in principle

SAI agrees that the Writing to the Point should be eliminated and consolidated with the Essentials of Report Writing. However, the elimination of any course will need to be discussed in more detail with the Executive Director and new incoming director.

Recommendation 2: Agree, if course is maintained

SAI agrees to include additional writing exercisers with the focus on concepts discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 of the course workbook.



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Recommendation 3: Agree in Principle, if course is maintained

SAI will discuss how best to include some personal evaluation of a students' writing skill. However, since SAI is going with contractors for all of its courses, the cost of this additional requirement will need to be analyzed.

Recommendation 4: Agree, if course is maintained

SAI will make corrections as identified.

Again thank you and your team members for the opportunity to comment on this report. I appreciate your time and energy involved in this review. I also believe your review will improve the delivery of this course.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (703) 248-4589.